

percent—83 percent. Talk about a buildup. The Chinese nearly doubled their military spending in less than a decade. This is just the PRC's publicly acknowledged funding.

These numbers have very real implications. When China gets a leg up in terms of readiness or technology, they are able to hold a greater number of U.S. and allied forces at risk. They are able to push their air and maritime control further into the Indo-Pacific region, increasing hegemonic control and effectively pushing the United States and our allies back.

So the importance of this funding agreement is not simply our ability to provide for the upkeep and regular maintenance on our military as it currently exists. We are also talking about building the U.S. military of the future—research, development, and modernization—so that our Nation and our servicemembers are equipped to keep Americans safe and project power as necessary for years and decades to come.

In my view, this grave responsibility should be a top, top priority on both sides of the aisle, and this funding agreement will allow us to get it done. I am proud that it will meet the pressing needs of servicemembers stationed at installations around the country, like Ft. Campbell, Ft. Knox, and the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky. The deal will secure sorely needed investment in the national defense, and it contains none of the far-left poison pills that House Democrats had sought, like going backward on the issue of life or stripping away rightful Presidential authorities. In divided government, that is what we call a good deal. The Senate will vote on it before the end of next week.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, first, the Senate will confirm several more impressive nominations. We are currently considering Stephen Dickson, of Georgia, to lead the Federal Aviation Administration. After him, we will turn our attention to two district court nominees. Wendy Williams Berger is the President's choice for the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida. She is a two-time graduate of Florida State University, with nearly three decades of courtroom experience, half of which has come on the bench.

Brian Buescher has been tapped for a vacancy in the District of Nebraska, where he has spent nearly two decades practicing law. Throughout his career, he has gained expertise in a wide array of legal areas and has earned admiration within the Nebraska legal community and beyond.

Those who know Mr. Buescher praise his "intelligence, integrity, professionalism, attentiveness, [and] character." The mayor of Omaha, where he has spent his entire legal career said: "Mr. Buescher would be an impartial

judge capable of setting aside personal opinion."

Despite his objective qualifications and all this praise, our Senate Democratic colleagues were not satisfied. Here was the bombshell that offended some of our colleagues with respect to this nominee. Listen to this. The nominee is a practicing Catholic.

My goodness, imagine that—in the United States of America, a person of faith, serving in government. Really?

In particular, some of our Democratic colleagues raked him over the coals in committee for his membership in the Knights of Columbus. It is shocking that a nominee for Federal district court would be a member of the Knights of Columbus.

Of course, we all know the Knights—a noted worldwide "extremist sect" of Catholics, which is about 2 million men strong, known among other things for their love of their Catholic faith, their unparalleled commitment to charitable work, and for hosting barbecues and pancake breakfasts.

Outrageous. I can't believe I need to repeat it in the U.S. Capitol, but there is nothing about living out one's faith that is disqualifying for public service—nothing. To the contrary, what the Constitution does forbid is imposing any kind of religious test for public office.

It is the Democrats' opposition to this nominee's faith, not his faith itself, that rubs against the grain of our Constitution. Fortunately, this tactic didn't fly. Our colleagues on the Judiciary Committee saw this tactic for what it is and voted to report Mr. Buescher favorably to the floor. I will be proud to vote to confirm him later today.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, the epidemic of opioid and substance abuse has wreaked havoc throughout our country. More than 2 million Americans suffer from opioid addiction. For years, the situation only seemed to get worse and worse. Unfortunately, my home State of Kentucky saw the pain firsthand. We are among the hardest hit States by this crisis.

Last week, both Kentucky and the entire Nation received a glimmer of long-awaited good news. Preliminary figures from the National Center for Health Statistics show that last year, 2018, saw the first—the first—nationwide decline in drug overdose deaths since 1990. For 28 straight years, overdose deaths climbed. But in 2018, that tragic number finally dropped. It was approximately a 5-percent decline nationwide.

In Kentucky, the Bluegrass State saw overdose deaths fall by nearly 15 percent last year, the largest drop in our State in more than a decade. After years of working and waiting, we are finally seeing progress in the fight to save lives. These numbers didn't hap-

pen on their own. Our comprehensive response involves countless law enforcement officers, medical professionals, educators, community leaders, and family members and friends of those affected.

I am proud of that. Several times in recent years, this Senate has done our part to bolster this fight with sweeping—sweeping—bipartisan action. We passed wide-ranging legislation to backstop the work on the frontlines with new programs, new funding for research, and new Federal resources for the communities most in need.

Just last year, we passed another landmark bill to attack the crisis of abuse from every single angle. Among its many features, the legislation makes it harder to traffic illegal drugs across the border; it supports mothers and babies struggling with opioid withdrawal; and it even includes one of my provisions to help those in recovery find a good job and stable housing as they work toward long-term recovery.

I am particularly proud of Kentucky's own role in leading in this recovery. Researchers at the University of Kentucky received the largest Federal grant in the school's history to fight opioid abuse all across our State. I was pleased to help them secure these resources as they aim to achieve a 40-percent reduction of opioid overdose deaths in 3 years.

In my hometown of Louisville, a private sector research facility received FDA approval for a medicine to ease withdrawal symptoms. I have worked to secure the inclusion of more Kentucky counties under the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program and increase coordination among local, State, and Federal law enforcement on drug interdiction.

This tireless work by Kentuckians has helped write the headlines we are celebrating today, but, of course, there is still much more to do. We know this is not the end of the battle against addiction—not even close—but it is encouraging to see the reduction in overdose deaths across the country.

As majority leader, I will continue to fight to ensure Kentucky and the Nation have the resources to build on this progress, prevent and treat addiction, and ultimately save lives.

ISRAEL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, yesterday, the Democratic House of Representatives took a small step—small—to denounce the scourge of anti-Semitism. They passed a symbolic resolution opposing efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and condemn the BDS movement.

It is too bad all of this, of all things, couldn't have been a unanimous vote. It is too bad that 16 Democrats voted against condemning BDS. Sixteen Democrats voted against condemning BDS over in the House yesterday.

It is regrettable that some of the Democrats who claim to represent the

future of their party lobbied against the measure that should be completely without controversy.

Even more broadly, I am sorry the bipartisan Senate-passed bill that would actually do something about BDS—in other words, action, not mere rhetoric—is still languishing over in the House without a vote, bipartisan legislation that passed with the support of 77 Senators, including my friend the Democratic leader—77 votes in the Senate, thoroughly bipartisan, but the Democratic House has found a way to fumble the ball.

Several months back, it took days of throat-clearing and a whole lot of watering down before they could even halfway condemn anti-Semitic remarks by one of their own Members. Now this symbolic BDS resolution is held up as a major victory, while Senate-passed legislation that would actually take action—actually do something against BDS—doesn't even get a vote. They will not even give it a vote over there in the House.

House Republicans have called for a vote on S. 1 over and over and over again, but the Speaker of the House doesn't seem interested.

I understand that picking fights with the President seems to be a higher priority across the Capitol than joining with the Senate to get bipartisan legislation actually made into law, but surely taking action to combat anti-Semitic efforts to delegitimize Israel shouldn't be too much to ask.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Stephen M. Dickson, of Georgia, to be Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration for the term of five years.

TAX REFORM

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, last week, Senator CARDIN and I introduced our S Corporation Modernization Act. That brings the total of tax reform bills I have introduced so far this year to six.

Obviously, 2017 was a banner year for tax reform. In December of 2017, we passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, a historic, comprehensive reform of our Tax Code that put more money in American families' pockets and helped spur growth at American businesses.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act has been a great success for our economy and for hard-working Americans, but there are still things we can do to strengthen our Tax Code even further.

As I mentioned, last week, Senator CARDIN and I introduced our S Corporation Modernization Act. S corporations are the most common formal business structure in the United States. There are nearly 5 million of these businesses throughout the United States, including large numbers in rural America. Despite the popularity of S corporations, however, there have been few S corporation-related changes to the Tax Code since this business structure was created.

There are things we can do to make it easier for these businesses to operate and raise capital. That is why Senator CARDIN and I developed the S Corporation Modernization Act. Our legislation makes pro-growth reforms that will make it easier for these businesses to grow and create new jobs and opportunities in their communities.

Change is a human constant, but with modern technology, the pace of change has seemed to accelerate. American workers and American businesses face very different situations than they did even a decade ago. It is important that our Tax Code keeps pace with the 21st century economy.

In February, I reintroduced my Mobile Workforce State Income Tax Simplification Act along with Senator SHERROD BROWN. Today substantial numbers of workers travel to different States for temporary work assignments on a regular basis, and they end up subject to a bewildering variety of State laws governing State income tax.

Senator BROWN's and my legislation would create an across-the-board standard for mobile employees who spend a short period of time working across State lines. It would ensure that States receive fair tax payments while substantially simplifying tax requirements for employees and employers.

In March, I introduced two other bills focused on updating the Tax Code for the 21st century economy. The last decade or so has seen the rise of the gig economy—services provided by individuals through apps and websites like Uber, Lyft, TaskRabbit, Postmates, Grubhub, and many others. These arrangements have stretched the boundaries of current tax law.

My New Economy Works to Guarantee Independence and Growth Act, or the NEW GIG Act, as we call it, updates our tax law to provide clear guidance on the classification of this new generation of workers. It will ensure that Uber drivers, Postmates, Taskers, and others are treated as independent contractors for purposes of tax law if

they meet a set of objective criteria. The certainty my bill provides will benefit not only these workers but also traditional independent contractors like freelance writers and delivery drivers.

I also introduced the Digital Goods and Services Tax Fairness Act in March with Senator WYDEN. Our legislation is designed to prevent consumers from being faced with multiple taxes for downloading digital products.

For example, right now, a digital purchase of a television series could hypothetically be taxed in up to three States, depending on the circumstances of the purchase. The Digital Goods and Services Tax Fairness Act would provide rules of the road for taxing digital goods and services and ensure that digital purchases could only be taxed in one State—the State in which the consumer resides.

It would also prohibit States and local governments from taxing digital goods at higher rates than tangible goods. In other words, under our bill, that season of "The Office" that you want to buy digitally shouldn't be taxed at a higher rate than if you were purchasing the season on DVD.

We have a proud history of charitable giving in this country. Americans care about a lot of worthy causes and are committed to helping those in need. That is why I have routinely introduced amendments to the Tax Code to make charitable giving easier, several of which have been signed into law.

This year, I again introduced the Charities Helping Americans Regularly Throughout the Year Act, or CHARITY Act, with Senator CASEY. This year's version of our bill builds on some of the provisions we succeeded in getting passed over the past few years and will continue to help make it easier for Americans to give—and charities to receive—money.

Finally, this year I once again introduced legislation to repeal the punitive double—or triple—taxation known as the death tax. I have worked a lot on the death tax issue over the years because of the way it affects family farms and ranches. The death tax can make it difficult or impossible to hand off the family farm or ranch to the next generation.

While we gave farmers and ranchers substantial relief from the death tax in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, that relief is only guaranteed for 6½ more years, which is why I am committed to passing a permanent death tax repeal.

I am proud of the progress we have made for American businesses and American families with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, and I will continue working on these bills and others to further refine the Tax Code to spur economic growth and to address the realities of the 21st century economy.

TRIBUTE TO LYNN TJEERDSMA

Madam President, before I close, I would like to take a couple of minutes to recognize a staffer of mine who will be retiring at the end of this work period.